

comes to speaking about environmental issues. While the gentleman from Washington (Mr. INSLEE), for example, is very tough on environmental issues, the fact is I can negotiate with the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER). I can negotiate with the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO). And that is exactly why the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) and the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) and the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. WALDEN) and myself and the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) and the gentleman from California (Mr. POMBO), that is exactly why that group of people came together to work out a compromise with the Senate to come up with a bill that is good for all of us.

So what we are seeing today is not opposition to the content of the bill by the gentleman from Washington (Mr. INSLEE). What we are seeing with all due respect to the gentleman from Washington (Mr. INSLEE) is sour grapes. Hey, I did not get to play in the game. I was not invited to the meeting.

As I said, there is a reason why the gentleman from Washington (Mr. INSLEE) was not invited to the meeting. I wanted a meeting with production. I needed to have a meeting that would come out with a product that could pass both the Senate and the House and accomplish something out there with our forests, and that is exactly what this bill does. That is exactly why we should pass this rule and that is exactly why I expect this bill in both the Senate and the House, the Senate and the House, to pass with bipartisan; that is, Republican and Democratic, support.

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume. I thank again my good friend from Washington (Mr. HASTINGS) for having yielded me time.

As the gentleman previously mentioned, this is a typical rule for a conference report and I will not oppose it. I will, however, oppose the underlying conference report, not because my good friend said it would not have been productive to have some of us in the conference. I do not serve on the committee so I do not know how I got thrown into that. I would not have been in the conference in the first place and perhaps he should not have been.

But, Mr. Speaker, President Theodore Roosevelt told Congress in 1907, "The conservation of our natural resources and the proper use constitute the fundamental problem which underlies almost every other problem of our national life."

Indeed, it does, Mr. Speaker.

In 2002 alone, wildfires burned more than 6½ million acres at a cost to taxpayers of more than \$1 billion. Hundreds of families were evacuated and uncontrollable fires caused millions of dollars worth of damage. The images of the recent wildfires in southern California are fresh in our minds and pic-

tures of homes burning to the ground and thoughts of livelihoods being destroyed will never be forgotten.

Yes, the underlying report takes significant steps to improve our ability to combat and mitigate wildfires. And, again, I congratulate the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. WALDEN), the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) and their ranking members and their committee for their work. But in my opinion it goes a bit too far. And for anyone who says that this or any other bill is not a perfect bill but we should support it anyway, I say absolutely not. If we know that a problem exists in the legislation, then let us fix it. Let us fix it before it becomes law.

The underlying conference report loosens current law regarding the logging and controlled burning of our Nation's forests. Moreover, it eviscerates environmental studies and the ability of organizations and private citizens to submit appeals on the cutting down of as many as 20 million acres. Under the report, appeals are subject to, in my view, unnecessary and unrealistic deadlines that insult the process and force Federal judges to adhere to judicial deadlines that make it impossible to fully consider the complexities of the appeal.

Mr. Speaker, at a time when more than half of the United States is experiencing some form of drought and dryness, it is critical for Congress to consider legislation that is proactive in defending and responding to the adverse effects of wildfires. And I spoke last night with the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. WALDEN) and the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) and my friends in the Committee on Rules about the fact that drought is an attendant feature that must deal with our concerns about forest fires.

It is equally critical for Congress to also consider legislation that helps communities mitigate the effects of the reoccurring events that often result in an excessive and prolonged fire season. In fact, my colleague on the other side of the aisle, the gentleman from Montana (Mr. REHBERG) and I have introduced a bill that does just that. H.R. 2781, the National Drought Preparedness Act, moves our country away from an ad hoc response-oriented approach and towards a more proactive mitigation-based approach.

Our bill provides States and local communities with the resources and tools to develop drought preparedness plans and think about the ramifications of drought before we find ourselves in one.

We are now faced with a vote clearly indicative of the concerns raised by President Roosevelt nearly one century ago. Whether we answer the challenge made by the late President or allow his legacy to fall victim to an influential timber lobby is a decision that Members will have to make later today.

I realize we do not oppose removing excess vegetation that increases the risk and facilitates the spread of

wildfires. I certainly do not take issue with the report's efforts to address insect manifestations in forests. It is, in fact, crucial that Congress address these two issues.

What I do take issue with, however, is why the majority cannot just stop there. Instead, it uses the report to further its agenda under the blanket of healthy forests. Cutting down national forests and limiting public participation and administrative reviews does not get us any closer to stopping the spread of wildfires, and it certainly does not make our forests any healthier.

Teddy Roosevelt once noted, "Forests are the lungs of our land, purifying the air and giving fresh strength to our people." He continued, "A nation that destroys its soils destroys itself."

Mr. Speaker, we must not allow the late President Roosevelt's warning to be realized by the 108th Congress. I urge my colleagues to support the rule and oppose the underlying report.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, the bill that this rule allows to be taken up is a very significant piece of legislation, and I just want to make one point that I do not think has been made in the debate on this rule regarding this underlying legislation, and that is that this legislation is geared towards what we call multiple use areas within our national system, our national forests and our BLM lands. Multiple use by definition means it should be open for recreation, commercial activity, and so forth. But, unfortunately, with policies that have been enacted de facto in the past 10 or 15 years, in fact, we have closed up these multiple use areas.

This legislation addresses these problems that have built up for a time and as a result has built up to unhealthy forests and unhealthy BLM lands. So it is a significant first start, an extremely significant first start.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the rule and support the underlying legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time, and I move the previous question on the resolution.

The previous question was ordered.

The resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will postpone further proceedings today on motions to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered or on which a vote is objected to under clause 6 of rule XX.

Record votes on postponed questions will be taken later today.

HIGHLANDS CONSERVATION ACT

Mr. CALVERT. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1964) to establish the Highlands Stewardship Area in the States of Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 1964

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Highlands Conservation Act".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following—

(1) The Highlands region is a physiographic province that encompasses more than 2,000,000 acres extending from eastern Pennsylvania through the States of New Jersey and New York to northwestern Connecticut.

(2) The Highlands region is an environmentally unique area that—

(A) provides clean drinking water to over 15,000,000 people in metropolitan areas in the States of Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania;

(B) provides critical wildlife habitat, including habitat for 247 threatened and endangered species;

(C) maintains an important historic connection to early Native American culture, colonial settlement, the American Revolution, and the Civil War;

(D) contains recreational resources for 14 million visitors annually;

(E) provides other significant ecological, natural, tourism, recreational, educational, and economic benefits; and

(F) provides homeownership opportunities and access to affordable housing that is safe, clean, and healthy.

(3) An estimated 1 in 12 citizens of the United States live within a 2-hour drive of the Highlands region.

(4) More than 1,400,000 residents live in the Highlands region.

(5) The Highlands region forms a greenbelt adjacent to the Philadelphia-New York City-Hartford urban corridor that offers the opportunity to preserve water, forest and agricultural resources, wildlife habitat, recreational areas, and historic sites, while encouraging sustainable economic growth and development in a fiscally and environmentally sound manner.

(6) Continued population growth and land use patterns in the Highlands region—

(A) reduce the availability and quality of water;

(B) reduce air quality;

(C) fragment the forests;

(D) destroy critical migration corridors and forest habitat; and

(E) result in the loss of recreational opportunities and scenic, historic, and cultural resources.

(7) The water, forest, wildlife, recreational, agricultural, and cultural resources of the Highlands region, in combination with the proximity of the Highlands region to the largest metropolitan areas in the United States, make the Highlands region nationally significant.

(8) The national significance of the Highlands region has been documented in—

(A) the New York-New Jersey Highlands Regional Study conducted by the Forest Service in 1990;

(B) the New York-New Jersey Highlands Regional Study: 2002 Update conducted by the Forest Service;

(C) the bi-State Skylands Greenway Task Force Report;

(D) the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan;

(E) the New York State Open Space Conservation Plan;

(F) the Connecticut Green Plan: Open Space Acquisition FY 2001-2006;

(G) the open space plans of the State of Pennsylvania; and

(H) other open space conservation plans for States in the Highlands region.

(9) The Highlands region includes or is adjacent to numerous parcels of land owned by the Federal Government or federally designated areas that protect, conserve, or restore resources of the Highlands region, including—

(A) the Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge;

(B) the Shawanagunk Grasslands Wildlife Refuge;

(C) the Morristown National Historical Park;

(D) the Delaware and Lehigh Canal Corridors;

(E) the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area;

(F) the Delaware River Basin;

(G) the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area;

(H) the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River;

(I) the Appalachian National Scenic Trail;

(J) the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York;

(K) the Highlands National Millenium Trail;

(L) the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge;

(M) the proposed Crossroads of the Revolution National Heritage Area;

(N) the proposed Musconetcong National Scenic and Recreational River in New Jersey; and

(O) the Farmington River Wild and Scenic Area in Connecticut.

(10) It is in the interest of the United States to protect, conserve, and restore the resources of the Highlands region for the residents of, and visitors to, the Highlands region.

(11) The States of Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania, and units of local government in the Highlands region have the primary responsibility for protecting, conserving, preserving, restoring and promoting the resources of the Highlands region.

(12) Because of the longstanding Federal practice of assisting States in creating, protecting, conserving, and restoring areas of significant natural and cultural importance, and the national significance of the Highlands region, the Federal Government should, in partnership with the Highlands States and units of local government in the Highlands region, protect, restore, and preserve the water, forest, agricultural, wildlife, recreational and cultural resources of the Highlands region.

SEC. 3. PURPOSES.

The purposes of this Act are as follows:

(1) To recognize the importance of the water, forest, agricultural, wildlife, recreational and cultural resources of the Highlands, and the national significance of the Highlands region to the United States.

(2) To authorize the Secretary of the Interior to work in partnership with the Secretary of Agriculture to provide financial assistance to the Highlands States to preserve and protect high priority conservation lands in the Highlands region.

(3) To continue the ongoing Forest Service programs in the Highlands region to assist the Highlands States, local units of government and private forest and farm landowners in the conservation of lands and natural resources in the Highlands region.

SEC. 4. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act:

(1) HIGHLANDS REGION.—The term "Highlands region" means the physiographic province, defined by the Reading Prong and ecologically similar adjacent upland areas, that encompasses more than 2,000,000 acres extending from eastern Pennsylvania through the States of New Jersey and New York to northwestern Connecticut.

(2) HIGHLANDS STATE.—The term "Highlands State" means—

(A) the State of Connecticut;

(B) the State of New Jersey;

(C) the State of New York;

(D) the State of Pennsylvania; and

(E) any agency or department of any Highlands State.

(3) LAND CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROJECT.—The term "land conservation partnership project" means a land conservation project located within the Highlands region identified as having high conservation value by the Forest Service in which a non-Federal entity acquires land or an interest in land from a willing seller for the purpose of permanently protecting, conserving, or preserving the land through a partnership with the Federal Government.

(4) NON-FEDERAL ENTITY.—The term "non-Federal entity" means any Highlands State, or any agency or department of any Highlands State with authority to own and manage land for conservation purposes, including the Palisades Interstate Park Commission.

(5) STUDY.—The term "study" means the New York-New Jersey Highlands Regional Study conducted by the Forest Service in 1990.

(6) UPDATE.—The term "update" means the New York-New Jersey Highlands Regional Study: 2002 Update conducted by the Forest Service.

SEC. 5. LAND CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS IN THE HIGHLANDS REGION.

(a) SUBMISSION OF PROPOSED PROJECTS.—Annually, the Governors of the Highlands States, with input from pertinent units of local government and the public, may jointly identify land conservation partnership projects in the Highlands region that shall be proposed for Federal financial assistance and submit a list of those projects to the Secretary of the Interior.

(b) CONSIDERATION OF PROJECTS.—The Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with the Secretary of Agriculture, shall annually submit to Congress a list of those land conservation partnership projects submitted under subsection (a) that are eligible to receive financial assistance under this section.

(c) ELIGIBILITY CONDITIONS.—To be eligible for financial assistance under this section for a land conservation partnership project, a non-Federal entity shall enter into an agreement with the Secretary of the Interior that—

(1) identifies the non-Federal entity that shall own or hold and manage the land or interest in land;

(2) identifies the source of funds to provide the non-Federal share required under subsection (d);

(3) describes the management objectives for the land that will assure permanent protection and use of the land for the purpose for which the assistance will be provided;

(4) provides that, if the non-Federal entity converts, uses, or disposes of the land conservation partnership project for a purpose inconsistent with the purpose for which the assistance was provided, as determined by the Secretary of the Interior, the United States may seek specific performance of the conditions of financial assistance in accordance with paragraph (3) in Federal court and shall be entitled to reimbursement from the non-Federal entity in an amount that is, as determined at the time of conversion, use, or disposal, the greater of—

(A) the total amount of the financial assistance provided for the project by the Federal Government under this section; or

(B) the amount by which the financial assistance increased the value of the land or interest in land; and

(5) provides that land conservation partnership projects will be consistent with areas identified as having high conservation value in the following:

(A) Important Areas portion of the Forest Service study.